



Transnational Embeddedness of Nigerian Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Ghana, West Africa

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Abstract

Transnationalism has provided an important optic for understanding immigrant entrepreneurship in the past three decades. However, the existing discourse often neglects Africa as a context for the articulation of immigrant entrepreneurship. Leaning on the constructivist epistemology with empirical base anchored in in-depth interviews and observational data, I explore the transnational contours and practices of Nigerian immigrants in Ghana and their entrepreneurial articulation in the country. First, I show how these immigrant entrepreneurs are embedded in multiple layers of transnationalism, namely one-way, two-way, and tripartite transnationalism. Secondly, I demonstrate the ways these entrepreneurial activities are embedded in Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through the transnational economic opportunity structures it has created and are being exploited by the immigrants and the range of institutions, practices, and services that have emerged because of the existence of ECOWAS itself. A third dimension of transnationalism in the operation of Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghana relates to labor recruitment through the traditional apprenticeship system, which, grounded in intersubjective field, crisscross the home and host communities. From these findings, I conclude by positioning the immigrants and their entrepreneurial processes as transnationally embedded.

Keywords Immigrant entrepreneurs · Transnationalism · Transnational embeddedness · Ghana · Nigeria

Introduction

Transnational immigrant entrepreneurship scholarship has developed for almost 30 years with Europe and North America as the major contexts. A recent study (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp 2013) which purports to be “the first systematic literature review

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of the immigrant entrepreneurship field” (p. 820) mapped out studies in North America (USA and Canada), Europe (Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Norway, Denmark, and the UK) and Oceania (Australia). Absent in this review was Africa as a context for the articulation of immigrant entrepreneurship. Yet as pointed out by the United Nations (2016), close to a tenth of the current 244 million international migrants worldwide live on the African continent. International immigrants on the African continent are more than those in the Oceania region; also more than the combined Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania (UN 2016). Africa has thus emerged as a destination for many international migrants, and as epiphenomena of migration, immigrants in Africa also engage in (transnational) entrepreneurial pursuits. The existing studies on immigrant entrepreneurship focus mainly on the southern African region, in particular South Africa with immigrants from other African countries like Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

A key viewpoint in this paper is that immigrant entrepreneurship, in particular transnational immigrant entrepreneurship is not specific only to North American and European contexts or even Southern Africa. Drawing on Nigerian immigrants in Ghana and their transnational entrepreneurial activities and embeddedness, I offer a West African case of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship to contribute to the emerging position of Africa as a context for the articulation of immigrant entrepreneurship. I further argue in this paper that, understanding transnational embeddedness of Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghana contributes to altering the dominant south-north view in migration studies in Africa. Migration scholarship in Africa is generally driven by the north-south discourse, with little or no intra-continental perspective. Yet as noted by some migration scholars and commissioned studies (see for example Arthur 1991; Awumbila 2009; Gould 1974; Ngwenya 2010; Olatuyi et al. 2013; Sahel and West Africa Club [SWAC] & OECD 2006), there is a growing interest in intra-continental migration with some demonstrating a south-south thematic dominance in African international migration (Antwi Bosiakoh 2009, 2011; Awumbila 2009; Awumbila et al. 2014; Ngwenya 2010; SWAC & OECD 2006). This paper thus focuses on the generally overlooked migration destination region, in particular, the West African region of the African continent, drawing on the contemporary participants in the ancient Nigeria-Ghana migratory corridor (Boahen 1975; Arhin 1979; Eades 1994) and their transnational entrepreneurial activities in the country. It contributes to showcasing intra-continental migration as a dominant feature of African migration and further demonstrates interconnectedness and embeddedness of the actors and their entrepreneurial articulations with and into other regions around the world.

Transnationalism, broadly defined as “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Vertovec 1999, p. 447) or, as noted by Schiller et al. (1992) and echoed by Mazzucato (2008), the back and forth movements of people, goods, money, and ideas between and among the countries, is the lens deployed to gaze these immigrant entrepreneurs. Transnationalism has become an important part of migration scholarship and in particular, in the articulation of immigrant entrepreneurship, a development which has been accentuated by globalization in terms of advancements in communication and transportation technologies, accelerated global interdependence of national economies, and reduced barriers to migration. Drawing on this insight and the diverse transnational engagement contours and practices embedded in the operation of Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghana, I argue that Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs in Ghana are transnationally engaged and

embedded and that transnational engagement and embeddedness practices are a key part of their entrepreneurial operations in the country. By transnational embeddedness (as used in this paper), and drawing on earlier works in the field (Rusinovic 2008; Vertovec 1999; Schiller et al. 1992), I refer to the ways in which Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs in Ghana connect and acquiesce themselves and their entrepreneurial activities to multiple countries, both within the West African subregion and other regions around the world. This creates new geographies of transnational social fields or transnational contexts for entrepreneurial articulation. In the sections that follow from here, I profile transnational immigrant entrepreneurship and embeddedness before laying out the methods of inquiry to make way for discussion of findings and conclusion.

A Silhouette of Transnational Immigrant Entrepreneurship and Embeddedness

Rogerson and Mushawemhuka (2015 p. 136) have noted that transnational immigrant entrepreneurship represents an “evolving and consolidating field” that occupies the “interface between social and regional sciences.” This positioning places transnational enterprises of immigrants in the *globalizing process*, contributing in diverse ways to economic and cultural or even political integration of immigrants across space. They also contribute to bridging localities and places (Portes et al. 2002). But as pointed out by Rusinovic (2008), it is not every immigrant entrepreneur who is or can be transnationally active and embedded. This is because transnational immigrant entrepreneurship requires a *transnational capital*, sort of transnational networks (see also Peberdy and Rogerson 2000; Portes and Yiu 2013) in the form of contacts or associates, and this is not available automatically to every immigrant entrepreneur. Thus, Zhou (2004) has noted that transnational enterprises, regardless of their sizes, are firmly dependent on social networks across space for their operation. Also, Peberdy and Rogerson (2000 p. 22) note that transnational entrepreneurs are involved in diverse activities as cross-border traders, street traders, and operators of small, medium, and micro-enterprises (SMMEs), and their activities connect strong informal and formal transnational networks of trade, entrepreneurship, and migration, some of which extend beyond continental boundaries. Similarly, Portes et al. (2002) study of Latin American immigrant entrepreneurship in the USA shows that, two-thirds of them depend on different categories of transnational ties for their survival and for expansion. Rusinovic (2008) further demonstrates that transnational immigrant entrepreneurs, both second and first-generations, are embedded in transnational networks. But while for first-generation immigrant entrepreneurs, transnational networks are often a necessity, for the second-generation, they are deployed more as a strategy, the so-called ‘strategic transnationalism’.

Thus, by and large, access to transnational capital/network is a pre-requisite for immigrants to engage in transnational entrepreneurship. But as Goktan and Flores (2014) note, there are a set of micro and macro-level factors that explain why transnational entrepreneurship emerges. While the transnational capital/networks of the entrepreneurs are important micro-level requirement, the most critical factors are macro in nature and aggregate around international migration itself giving the fact that,

transnational immigrant entrepreneurs are immigrants who have left their own countries of nationality, residing, and pursuing their entrepreneurial activities in another country and bear cross-national links (Rogerson and Mushawemhuka 2015). Also, international migration is a function of other factors including political disturbance, violent internal conflicts, and domestic economic problems. For example, Rogerson and Mushawemhuka (2015) show how political turmoil and economic collapse in Zimbabwe explain Zimbabwean migration to South Africa and thus formed the foundation for the emergence of Zimbabwean immigrants' transnational enterprises. Similarly, migration of Nigerians to Ghana is anchored on multiple factors reflecting political (like democratic culture, peace, and security in Ghana) as well as economic and historical considerations including the subregion's politico-economic governance structure, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Antwi Bosiakoh 2009, 2019), and it is on this migration that Nigerian immigrants' transnational businesses in Ghana hang.

Some research give accounts for the different pathways immigrant entrepreneurs become transnational (Grillo 2007), and the key characteristics and success factors of these entrepreneurs (Lin and Tao 2012). In the UK, studies on Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs detail their transition from the old "ethnic enclave" character to diaspora/transnational entrepreneurship (Ojo 2012) where dual opportunities are leveraged by traversing entrepreneurial opportunity spaces (Barrett and McEvoy 2013; Jones et al. 2010; Ojo 2012). Schans (2012, p. 81) also reports on the transnational stratagem for success in the so-called *container business*, by Nigerians in Japan who buy second-hand cars, car parts and other items, and ship them back home to sell. For some immigrant entrepreneurs, business expansion imperative is the primary driver for going transnational (Lin and Tao 2012), but also, most factors responsible for driving immigrants into co-ethnic owned businesses, for example obstacles in host countries' labor market also exert pressure on some immigrants to go into transnational entrepreneurship (Lin and Tao 2012). More recently, Bagwell (2015 p. 346) has shown that for Vietnamese businesses in London, transnationalism should be regarded as a continuum ranging "from extensive cross-border connections who are fully embedded in two or more countries, to those for whom such links may be less active but are still important for the business to varying degrees."

Increasingly, technological advances are contributing to speeding-up the business expansion motive as well as international migration itself (Goktan and Flores 2014; Portes et al. 2002; Rogerson and Mushawemhuka 2015). Work by Portes et al. (2002) portrays transnational entrepreneurship as a unique mode of immigrant economic adaptation, often undertaken by better-off and more resourceful immigrants with long duration of stay in their host country and professionally better established. From this account, a typical transnational immigrant entrepreneur was more of an elite immigrant. But this account obfuscates what Lin and Tao (2012) refer to as *transnational semi-proletariats* embedded in the discourse on "transnationalism from below." For example, Rogerson and Mushawemhuka (2015) show that Zimbabwean transnational enterprises in South Africa are mainly in the small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs), employing between 3 and 23 people.

Thus, in the existing transnational immigrant entrepreneurship studies in Africa (Peberdy and Crush 2001; Peberdy 2000a, b; Peberdy and Rogerson 2000; Rogerson and Mushawemhuka 2015), transnationalism is seen as part of formal and informal

processes of regional trade relations. This means that the trans-border activities of immigrants, both formal and informal, contribute to regional economic cooperation and development as people, goods, capital, and ideas in these trading activities cross borders and circulate along the routes of the trade. But even in this context, Peberdy (2000b) notes that the use of “informal” to describe some transnational trading activities of immigrants is misleading and obscures the multiple linkages that exist between the formal and informal sectors of economic activities in countries connected to *informal* transnational immigrant entrepreneurship.

By highlighting the simultaneous ways immigrant businesses transcends multiple national boundaries, transnationalism creates new geographies and contexts beyond the local and national contexts, wherein some immigrant entrepreneurial activities are embedded, namely, in opportunity and niche structures that transcend the national borders of their adopted countries. Though these immigrant entrepreneurs are located in the countries of destination, they increasingly look for business opportunities that connect their countries of destination to their own countries of origin, and as would be shown later, sometimes further connecting their businesses to countries other than their destination and origin countries. These entrepreneurs are thus embedded in transnational context. I show this with the Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs of this study for whom transnationalism is so deeply grounded in their activities in Ghana that it allows them to engage in complex cross-national border activities across a range of business tasks, and contributes in diverse ways to sustaining their businesses. Their cross-border national activities connect them first to Nigeria and Togo in West Africa but also China, UK, Japan, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, etc. This transnational embeddedness functionally connects, coordinates and networks the entrepreneurs and their businesses to places outside of Ghana. As noted by Schiller et al. (1992) and echoed by Mazzucato (2008), the transnational perspective involves back and forth movements not only of people and goods, but also of money and ideas between and among the countries. These constructions of transnationalism find reality in the activities of Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs in this study. Their activities involve back and forth movements of people, goods, money, culture and tradition, and ideas. They crisscross national borders in West Africa as *West African traders* by road and by air, as well as other countries outside of Africa, mainly China in the so-called *China trade*.¹ For this reason, the entrepreneurs in this study are hardly permanent in staying in Ghana, their destination country. They are both transnational and transnationally embedded.

Methods and Data

This study draws on a 7-month qualitative fieldwork conducted from January to July 2015 on Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs in Ghana. The field study focused on three Ghanaian sites where Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs are known to concentrate, namely Accra, Kumasi, and Ashaiman. Accra is the capital city of Ghana, Kumasi, the second largest city, and Ashaiman is a sprawling suburban settlement.

¹ ‘China trade’ is used here as one illustration of the dominance of traders involved in the sale of (Chinese) goods in Ghana. However, interviews revealed that the entrepreneurs sourced their goods from other places outside of Africa, like Dubai, Singapore, UK, and Germany, among others.

Accra and Ashaiman are located in the Ghanaian southern region of Greater Accra while Kumasi in the Ashanti region is centrally located in Ghana. And while the cities of Accra and Kumasi serve as home to the largest number immigrants in Ghana (GSS 2013), Ashaiman is increasingly becoming a popular destination for immigrants because of its wide array of marginal suburbs. For Nigerian immigrants, Ashaiman's location on the way to Accra from the border town of Aflao makes it one likely place to settle (Antwi Bosiakoh 2017).

A total of 41 Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs were interviewed across the three study sites, most of whom at the business premises of the entrepreneurs. The view was to position the entrepreneurs and their activities as implanted in *transnational embeddedness*. Selection was in three stages, the first through purposeful identification of entrepreneurs, i.e. contact cases in earlier studies (Antwi Bosiakoh 2009, 2011). These contacts were snowballed in the second stage to identify more entrepreneurs. The final stage of the selection procedure involved diversifying the sample by identifying entrepreneurs involved in other activities. Most interviews were in Accra (41%; $n = 17$), followed by Kumasi (34%; $n = 14$). Similarly, Accra and Kumasi offered more diverse micro locations. Further to the interviews, the businesses of the entrepreneurs were observed and notes taken. All the procedures in this study adhered to requirements in the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007 – Updated March 2014) (the National Statement) and was approved by the Macquarie University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC (Human Sciences & Humanities))—Reference No: 5201400968—at its meeting on 28 November 2014.

Males were about six times more than females and married entrepreneurs about 4 times more than single entrepreneurs. The oldest entrepreneur was 60 years, and a manifest feature of the age structure is the high concentration (83% of the entrepreneurs) in the 20–49-year age regime. More than half of the entrepreneurs had secondary/post-secondary level (up to diploma) education and a quarter more of the entrepreneurs with tertiary education. All the entrepreneurs were of Igbo (76%; $n = 31$) and Yoruba (24%; $n = 10$) origins and mainly originated from southeastern states of Anambra, Enugu, and Imo.

Entrepreneurs in Three Levels of Transnational Embeddedness

One-Way Transnationalism

Transnational ties of the Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs begin with their homeland, Nigeria, but extend also to China and Togo, among others. These ties involve sourcing goods (from Nigeria, China, Togo, and others) and services (mainly from Nigeria) and entail direct travels, but also interactions in different forms. Ties with China and Togo are for sourcing goods, and the entrepreneurs travel personally or find ways to organize the transactions to bring their goods to Ghana. *Oluchi*² operates a Nigerian Foodstuff business at Suame in Kumasi and provides a good example of this kind of transnationalism. Her business is a kind of *cultural or ethnic enterprise* and the items of trade sourced from her hometown and other places in Nigeria. This is a form of cultural

² All names are pseudonyms to protect subject identities.

transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999) that connects Suame (in Kumasi) and Ghana generally to physically and culturally distinct places in Nigeria, creating what Vertovec (1999) may call a *transnational field* or embeddedness. *Oluchi's* business is both transnationally embedded and engaged. Like *Oluchi*, most Nigerian entrepreneurs in Ghana are involved in this kind of transnationalism (Table 1). They source the products of their trading entrepreneurial activities from Nigeria, Togo, China, and elsewhere around the world. This, however, does not suggest that these products were produced in the source countries. The entrepreneurs are aware that for most manufactured goods, what they consider to be the source countries (Nigeria and Togo) are intermediary countries that belie somewhere in the conventional hierarchy of centers in global flow of goods.

In Nigeria, their home country, the entrepreneurs express additional connections and ties, with friends, family, and other contacts. These connections exemplify *transnational capital* (Portes and Yiu 2013; Rusinovic 2008) or *transnational networks* (Peberdy and Rogerson 2000; Zhou 2004), and help the entrepreneurs by facilitating their entrepreneurial processes, serving as points of contact not only for the supply of goods from Nigeria but also in employee recruitment. This way, the entrepreneurs' transnational networks help to sustain their retail and wholesale economic activities in Ghana as well as help to build transnational relationships anchored in bounded solidarity and trust that stem from common national origin. As one-way transnationalism, these relationships, connections and ties, with friends, family, and other contacts flow in unidirectional way (Nigeria-Ghana, Togo-Ghana, China-Ghana, and Other countries-Ghana) (Table 1). For other entrepreneurs, transnationalism in their businesses is bifocal in character.

Two-Way Transnationalism

The idea of two-way transnationalism construes two-country transnational engagement practices, distinguished from the one-way transnationalism above and a tripartite transnationalism (next after this section), and involves constant movements of the

Table 1 Transnational practices of entrepreneurs (based on source of goods)

Transnational exchange interfaces in business	Accra	Kumasi	Ashaiman	Number of entrepreneurs
Nigeria-Ghana	4	3	2	9
Nigeria-Ghana and Ghana-Nigeria	2	2	1	5
Mix of Ghana and Nigeria	1	1	1	3
Togo-Ghana	1	1	0	2
China-Ghana	2	2	2	6
China-Nigeria-Ghana	1	2	0	3
Mix of Ghana, Nigeria, and China	1	1	0	2
Other countries*-Ghana	2	2	2	6
Ghana Non-transnational	3	0	2	5
Total	17	14	10	41

*UK, Japan, UAE, Germany, Singapore, etc.

entrepreneurs in Ghana to Nigeria to bring goods into Ghana and sending Ghanaian goods to Nigeria for same purposes. This is dual entrepreneurship with the entrepreneurs owning businesses in both Ghana and Nigeria or maintaining simultaneously, entrepreneurial statuses in both countries. The entrepreneurial activities in Ghana draw on goods from Nigeria while those in Nigeria are fed by Ghanaian goods. This way, the entrepreneurs sustain the circuit flow of material resources and information, among others between the two countries. This kind of transnational entrepreneurship is exclusive to Ghana and Nigeria. It is a West African affair grounded in the existing trans-West African economic opportunity or institutional structure (to be discussed later). Their activities transcend the unidirectional view or one-way flow of transnational engagement practices and help to recognize the immigrants as entrepreneurs embedded in both the destination country (Ghana) and in the sending country (Nigeria) contexts. This transnational operation strategy is functionally important for the entrepreneurial processes of the immigrants. *Obike* also operates Foodstuff business but in Adenta, Accra, and provides account that shows how this strategy helps deal with challenges in operating only in Ghana, including unstable exchange rate.

“There are foods in Ghana that Nigerians value but Ghanaians don’t because of their norms on food. We buy some of them and take to Nigeria and we buy our own Nigerian foods and bring them to our people who are living here. In the process, we make double profits on imports and exports. This helps deal with the unstable exchange rate.”

Obike’s narrative shows that by maintaining entrepreneurial status in both Ghana and Nigeria, he makes double profits—profit in Ghana and profit in Nigeria. But beyond making double profit with this two-way transnational import and export activities, immigrant entrepreneurs engaged in these transnational transactions also explained that they are spared the processes of transferring money to and from Ghana and Nigeria, including the costs associated with these transfers. *Obike’s* logic of maintaining dual entrepreneurial statuses in Ghana and Nigeria also connects to remittance. He thinks his business in Nigeria is fed and sustained by the one in Ghana through the goods and profits he obtains from Ghana. As such, his business in Nigeria is a remittance contribution from Ghana to the progress of his home country.

A further theme in the two-way transnational operation is that it is a mark of expansion and internationalization (Lin and Tao 2012) and brings respect and sense of success to the entrepreneurs. As such, entrepreneurs who currently are not engaged in two-way transnational transaction hope to do so or simply establish branches abroad, particularly in Nigeria but also elsewhere, and thus broaden the border-crossing/transnational engagement practices and embeddedness. These rationalities speak of transnational operation as motivated and oriented in profit-and-loss economics, expansion and internationalization and more broadly in Nigeria’s economic development. But the logic of the entrepreneurs’ two-way transnational trading activity is more than profit-and-loss economics and development. A further rationality is that engaging and embedding both in Ghana and Nigeria helps in their continuous engagement with the homeland. This means they do not disengage from their homeland. By maintaining business presence in Nigeria and by their own frequent travels to Nigeria on account of these businesses, the entrepreneurs maintain their attachment with Nigeria as they

exploit and traverse between entrepreneurial opportunity spaces (Barrett and McEvoy 2013; Jones et al. 2010). However, between opportunity exploitation and national attachment sentiment, it is not clear which is stronger or even comes first. What is clear, however, is that as succinctly submitted by Obike:

“... it feels like there is security. If things don’t work out well in Ghana, at least I can go back to Nigeria as I am not disengaged.”

In this sense of security implies the ability to identify and position themselves back in their own country even though they live in Ghana. They are engaged and embedded, not only in Ghana but also in Nigeria. Through this, they are not seen as people who have travelled abroad and have abandoned their homeland. This is a respected behavior non-migrant family members, friends, and the general home-country people expect from their migrant members and forms part of the national attachment logic, allowing the entrepreneurs to reclaim and develop both migration and entrepreneurial identities that reflected expected family norms and values as well as their patriotic sentiments. From this discourse, the entrepreneurs used their business pursuits to meet normative expectations from their non-migrant members. The two-way transnational mode thus offered them pathways for expressing their multiple embeddedness and illumined how each of the multiple elements of their embeddedness were important in relation to their entrepreneurial lives. But not all the entrepreneurs shared in the line of account by *Obike* and his friends. Some, like *Uchechukwu*, offered different account as follows:

“I was bringing mobile phones to supply. After supplying and I received payment, I used the money to buy goods in Ghana and sent back to Nigeria ... Then I eventually decided to stay. Operating both in Ghana and Nigeria was my way of knowing Ghana.”

Uchechukwu's narrative approximates the experiences of *Onyeama* who started trade by buying goods from Ghana, and in the process, found out that there were products that were needed in Ghana too. With this knowledge, *Onyeama* began bringing in some of these products like photo frames from Nigeria to Ghana. It was in this process that he decided to settle in Ghana. In this narrative, both *Uchechukwu* and *Onyeama* draw on their two-way transnational operations in Ghana and Nigeria to know Ghana. This is a case of using transnationalism as a strategy to embed their businesses domestically in Ghana. For some entrepreneurs, this process also helped them to “disembed” in Nigeria.

As entrepreneurs, both in Ghana and in Nigeria, two-way transnational immigrant operators are open to opportunities in the two countries and thus acquiesce themselves and their entrepreneurial activities into dual country and regulatory contexts/regimes (Rogerson and Mushawemhuka 2015). This allows for strength-weakness counterbalance and thus to lend themselves to transnational embeddedness (Rusinovic 2008). Like other forms of transnational engagements, this is characterized by repeated movements and crossing of borders, and exchange-based circulation of capital and goods to and from both directions (Mazzucato 2008; Schiller et al. 1992), a process which builds complex *social field*. This way, transnational embeddedness (enmeshing

geographically in Ghanaian and Nigerian localities and nations), with different contextual challenges, enablements, regulations, socio-cultural scenes, etc., help attune mixed embeddedness in an augmented configuration that recognizes the geographical tincture of entrepreneurs engaged simultaneously in two countries compressed into a single space, i.e., social field, *transnational space of mixed embeddedness*. The entrepreneurs are tapping into transnational economic opportunity structure that is specific to “citizens” of the West African subregional economic community, the ECOWAS which non-community citizens are disqualified to participate in it).

A Tripartite Transnationalism

The activities of some Nigerian entrepreneurs in Ghana exude three-way transnational engagement character. Unlike the one-way and two-way transnational engagement practices, this form of entrepreneurial transnationalism relies conceptually on *triangular* movements with Ghana, China, and Nigeria constituting the three-point vertices. Entrepreneurs in this arrangement, located in Kumasi and Accra only, belong to the “Chinese trade” category, with the products of their trade manufactured and sourced from China. They travel to China for their goods, and either retail or wholesale them in Kumasi and Accra. However, their entrepreneurial operations are connected to Nigeria in an unusual manner—a way meant to deal with what they called *high* tax regime in Ghana. *Udoka* explains:

“When I went to China for the first time, I brought my goods to Ghana directly and found out that the duties were too high. I complained to a friend who advised that I try Nigeria and I did it. It was cheaper. So, what I do is to ship from China to Nigeria and then bring the goods from Nigeria to Ghana. This is a longer process but cheaper overall than bringing directly to Ghana from China.”

By this strategy, entrepreneurs like *Udoka* receive vital information—part of social capital resources (Salvato and Melin 2008; Tata and Prasad 2008, 2015) to sidestep the tax regime in Ghana. This is despite the long process of business turnaround in this strategy. In this way, the entrepreneurs submit themselves to the Nigerian importation procedures, which they believe are friendlier to the operation of their businesses. However, other interviews disproved this view, showing that the Nigerian tax system was very amenable to evasion. The entrepreneurs appear to know the loopholes in the Nigerian importation regime and exploit them to their business advantage. These entrepreneurs further submit themselves to the West African-specific importation procedures in Ghana and therefore join many others, who, mainly because of lack of requisite capital to engage in “China trading” (and this was the case for several entrepreneurs), source their goods from Nigeria.

Thus, the entrepreneurs in this study can be classified into three categories. The first and most dominant category is the West African trading entrepreneurs. Some of these entrepreneurs operate simultaneously in Ghana and Nigeria (the two-way transnational entrepreneurs), but many of them bring goods from Nigeria, and a few, from Togo. The second category is the Ghana-China entrepreneurs. This includes those who source goods from other countries outside of Africa including China, Singapore, UAE, UK, Japan, etc. Notwithstanding these additions, China remains the dominant figure, hence

the name Chinese traders. All the entrepreneurs employing the tripartite transnational strategy belong to this category. Because of their relatively strong financial position and their frequent international travels, the first two categories of entrepreneurs carry a glorified identity (Lo 2016) and they are differentiated from the third, the Ghana-specific entrepreneurs whose activities do not involve international travels.

Thus, for most Nigerian entrepreneurs in Ghana, transnationalism constitutes agency in exploiting transnational entrepreneurial opportunities and market niches and in embedding their activities transnationally. This involves setting up subsidiaries outside of their destinations—in the origin country, but also the variegated cross-border practices they are involved for sourcing goods and services related to their businesses. These activities contribute to the structuring of “global transactions,” opening up “international capital, labour and consumer markets,” and create potential for the integration of enclave economy, both horizontally and vertically (Zhou 2004, p. 1059). This way, transnationalism bridges the bi-locational meta-narratives which conceptualize immigrant entrepreneurship as taking place in two territorially separated places that retain their autonomies to one of *communitas* or transnational social field (Mahler 1998), and in relation to the central argument in this paper, transnational embeddedness for immigrants’ entrepreneurial articulations.

Transnational Embeddedness in West African States

A key theme underneath the discussion of the transnational exchange interfaces (Table 1) is that the entrepreneurs are embedded in the West African states. This is elaborated here with the view to cast light onto the structure of the West African economic community—operating as a subregional institution, with its enshrined protocols to facilitate free movement of goods and people, which, as would be shown, has occasioned myriad migratory configurations, services and practices, both formal and informal, and features in the discourse of Nigerian immigrants’ entrepreneurship in Ghana. As such, the entrepreneurial activities of Nigerian immigrants in Ghana thus exist to exploit the transnational economic opportunity structure provided by the ECOWAS. The entrepreneurs draw inspirations from the ECOWAS protocols and this helps in exploring the West African institutional embeddedness of Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghana.

ECOWAS: Institution and Regulation

Established in 1975, the ECOWAS fosters subregional economic integration. Its founding treaty conferred the status of *Community citizenship* on nationals of member countries and enjoined member states to exempt Community citizens from holding visitors’ visas and residence permits in their territories. Community citizens were also allowed to work and undertake commercial and industrial activities in any part of the Community (Awumbila et al. 2014) to create an economically integrated and borderless region. In its revised treaty of 1993, ECOWAS reiterated “the removal, between Member States, of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, and to the right of residence and establishment” (Article 3.2.d.iii), and member nations were to recognize these rights and take appropriate measures to ensure full

enjoyment of these rights in accordance with the Community's protocols. Key in these protocols is the 1979 Protocol A/P.1/5/79 relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment. This protocol, which draws from the founding treaty, emphasized the visa-free entry for ECOWAS citizens intending to stay in any part of the Community for up to 90 days, or obtain permission from the appropriate institution within the member territory for extension beyond 90 days.

Following these, several supplementary protocols have been created to clarify and set directions for implementing different aspects of the 1979 Protocol A/P.1/5/79. These include the 1985 supplementary protocol A/SP.1/7/85 on code of conduct for the implementation of Protocol A/P.1/5/79, the 1986 supplementary protocol A/SP.1/7/86 on the *Right of Residence* part of Protocol A/P.1/5/79, and the 1990 supplementary protocol A/SP.2/5/90 on the implementation of the *Right to Establishment* part of Protocol A/P.1/5/79. In 1985, ECOWAS Member States adopted, through Decision A/DEC.2/7/85 of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, a standardized ECOWAS Travel Certificate to facilitate cross-border movements, making these movements easy and less costly. Similarly, in May 2000, an ECOWAS Passport was introduced to deepen the cross-border facilitation processes. All these required ratification and actions to be taken by member countries. As at 2013, only Ghana and Sierra Leone had taken actions of implementation in all cases (Table 2). Nigeria is yet to harmonize its immigration and emigration forms, but this notwithstanding, several Nigerian nationals are in Ghana on the account of Protocol A/P.1/5/79 and its supplementary protocols and decisions.

ECOWAS as Embeddedness

Seen from the transnational embeddedness point of view, the ECOWAS structure constitutes an institution, more appropriately a *transnational* institution and its protocols, signifying regulations whose implementation has structuring implications, not only for migration within the West African subregion, but also for entrepreneurial activities. Almost all the entrepreneurs in this study linked the explanation of their coming to Ghana to the fact that Ghana and Nigeria are members of the ECOWAS Community, and are therefore entitled, as "citizens" to visa-free entry to any ECOWAS-member states including Ghana. Though all the entrepreneurs have been in Ghana for more than 90 days, it was not possible to ascertain if they had obtained the appropriate permission from the Ghanaian immigration office to continue their stay in the country. However, even in the absence of this verification, the role of ECOWAS in their migration was never doubtful. And in their stay in Ghana, they rely on the injunction of ECOWAS to undertake commercial and industrial activities in the country. This means that ECOWAS regulations/protocols and decisions provide the appropriate setting in which the entrepreneurs have implanted their businesses, by allowing free movement of peoples and goods, along with granting right of residence through Community citizenship for nationals of member countries, as well as the entitlement for these "citizens" to undertake commercial/industrial activities in the member territories.

Thus, for Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs, both migration and entrepreneurial articulation are occasioned by ECOWAS and its protocols. This is a case of mixed embeddedness of subregional institution/protocol in migratory projects and

Table 2 Implementation actions on ECOWAS free movement protocols

Countries	Abolition of visa and entry requirements for stays up to 90 days	Introduction of ECOWAS travel certificate	Introduction of ECOWAS passport	Harmonized immigration and emigration forms
Benin	√	X	√	X
Burkina Faso	√	√	*	X
Cabo Verde	√	X	*	X
Côte d'Ivoire	√	X	√	X
Gambia, the	√	√	X	X
Ghana	√	√	√	√
Guinea	√	√	√	X
Guinea Bissau	√	X	√	X
Liberia	√	X	√	√
Mali	√	X	*	X
Niger	√	√	√	X
Nigeria	√	√	√	X
Senegal	√	X	√	X
Sierra Leone	√	√	√	√
Togo	√	X	√	X

Source: Awumbila et al. 2014: 67

Keys: √ = implemented; X = not yet implemented; * = no information provided

entrepreneurial pursuit of immigrants. The entrepreneurs are thus tapping into the West African economic opportunity structure, whose openings favor “citizens” of the sub-regional community. This economic opportunity structure and activities exploited by the immigrants are like the case described by Ban (2012) on Romanian immigrants’ economic transnationalism within the Eastern borders of the EU in terms of their characteristic short routes and easy border-crossing regimes.³ This is an archetypical case of transnational migration and transnational immigrant entrepreneurial engagement practices *enforced* by the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of peoples and goods and the granting of visa-free access into Ghana to citizens of member countries.

³ On the field, the entrepreneurs shared their experiences in moving goods from Nigeria to Ghana and vice versa. And while complaining about ‘high costs’, it appears that what was considered expensive depended on scale of business the entrepreneurs were involved. It was observed that for many, the cost was either affordable or forced to be affordable through bribery and corrupt practices that involved institutionalized patronage and networks involving government agencies like customs, immigration, and police.

ECOWAS: Emerging Institutions, Practices, and Services

Many institutions and services, both formal and informal, in Ghana and Nigeria have emerged and involved in the transnational structuring of the entrepreneurial activities of the immigrants. A good point of entry in this discourse is the banking system, where tighter consolidation/recapitalization and regulatory requirements in Nigeria forced some Nigerian banks to relocate, undertake merges or takeovers, or open foreign branches in Ghana (Antwi Bosiakoh 2011). This fed into the essence of the economically integrated and borderless region and some entrepreneurs rely on these foreign branches or merged/taken-over banks in Ghana for their transnational payment transactions. Additionally, some entrepreneurs depend on the burgeoning mobile-money transfer services in Ghana (Bampoe 2015; Nyame-Mensah 2013). In Ghana, the biggest operator in the mobile money sector is *MTN Money*. It also operates in Nigeria, and this helps with currency conversion across the two countries. The usefulness of these mobile-money transfer services is reflected most in the activities of immigrant entrepreneurs inhabiting the informal side of the economic process in Ghana. This way, banking operations within the West African subregion including mobile-money transfer services aid the activities of the entrepreneurs in their transnational payment transactions activities and therefore contribute to the transnational configurations embedded in these activities.

Also in Accra, Kumasi, and Lagos, there are many cross-country coach/bus services providing comfortable and hassle-free transport, thus facilitating the Ghana-Nigeria activities of most entrepreneurs. These coach services contribute to the transnational engagement practices of the entrepreneurs across the two countries adding weight to the transnational embeddedness treatise. They provide parcel delivery services which are becoming increasingly popular among some entrepreneurs. The operation of these coaches helps reduce entrepreneurs' frequent travels to and from Nigeria. In interviews, some entrepreneurs noted how they maintain links with coach service providers for their frequent travels within the ECOWAS region, and for receiving goods from their suppliers in Nigeria. This is increasingly becoming an embedded norm in the transnational operation. Often, the entrepreneurs communicate with their suppliers in Lagos through phone and WhatsApp calls about quantities of goods they need. Following this, the supplier initiates a process of parceling the goods, but before this is completed, the entrepreneur makes payment through a mobile money transfer service. The supplier then sends the parcel to the designated Lagos-Accra coach station, and before long it is received in Accra.

ABC Coach West Africa is a major player in this business, operating daily fleets from Accra to Lagos and vice versa and prides itself for providing 'dignified service' ... very suitable for business, travel and tourism'.⁴ There are also, several airlines including Africa World Airlines, Ethiopian Airlines and ASKY Airlines, just to mention few, that facilitate these transnational engagement practices and embeddedness of entrepreneurs who have the means to afford them. These coaches and air services therefore facilitate and help sustain the movement of some entrepreneurs and their goods between Ghana and Nigeria. Therefore, the trans-West African structuring of the

⁴ Sourced from the company's website at <http://www.abctransport.com/coachwestafrica.php>. Accessed 15 March 2016.

immigrants' entrepreneurial processes is explainable, from the mixed embeddedness frame of thought, in terms of the subregion's institutional context.

Transnational Recruitment of Labor

A further aspect of the entrepreneurs' activities grounded in transnationalism, that is the trans-West African embeddedness is in the labor recruitment structure and the cultural logic underlining this process. Most entrepreneurs depend on transnational recruiting from Nigeria to meet their labor needs, through the traditional apprenticeship system (Agozino and Anyanike 2007; Forrest 1994; Olutayo 1999). This labor is constituted by informal apprentices both family and ethnic people who are expected to learn the business over a period, thus providing non-remunerated labor for the running of the business. This way, the transnational-labor-apprentice-recruitment pattern, through its cultural manifestations, feeds into the broader transnational governance structure of labor re-allocation within the West African economic opportunity structure and contributes to a culturally flavored trans-West African embeddedness of immigrant entrepreneurship. In this process labor, the recruiting process and its cultural philosophy, are all grounded in "intersubjective field that crisscross the home and host communities" (Ban 2012, p. 143), and are grounded in the institution of ECOWAS and its protocol on free movement of people and goods across the subregion. Thus, through this labor recruitment (via the traditional apprenticeship system), the transnational configuration of the entrepreneurs takes on cultural elements, meaning that, it is not only physical products that move across borders but also intangible and immaterial aspects such as cultural practices.

A Transnational Embeddedness: Conclusion

The investigation into transnationalism in Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurship in Ghana, reveals how some immigrant entrepreneurial activities respond to the emerging economic opportunity structure that is conditioned by developments occurring internationally. This includes the growing interdependence between national economies and accelerated technological advancements. For entrepreneurs of this study, transnationalism helps to deal with the challenges in Ghana, take advantage of emerging opportunities and more importantly helps to conceptualize their activities as transnationally embedded. This conceptualization makes the best meaning when linked to the existing subregional economic community (ECOWAS) and the embeddedness it creates in member countries. Portes (2003) argues that the extent and forms of transnational activism vary with context of exit and reception. These exit-reception circuits relate, among other things, to the existing entry facilitation structures and frameworks. In the case of Nigerian immigrants' transnationalism in Ghana, this is facilitated by macro-politics of regional integration, law and regulations (specifically the binding protocols and decision of ECOWAS), improved access to transportation (mainly road and air transport), economic imperatives (integration of the economies of ECOWAS member states) and recent advances in telecommunication technology (radio, television, voice

and video calls, text messages) which have created unprecedented possibilities for both physical and virtual cross-border practices and interactions.

In this context, the discussion of transnational embeddedness of Nigerian immigrants in Ghana reflects the contextual conditions of Ghana and Nigeria, but also the West African subregional economic structure and beyond. Rogerson and Mushawemhuka (2015, p. 138) note that the “most critical distinguishing factor of transnational entrepreneurs ... is that of bifocality and their capacity to operate in (at least) two different business environments.” The entrepreneurs of this study provide empirical testament to this observation with their operation in the business environments of Ghana and Nigeria within the broader West African economic community. But besides the different cross-border practices within the West African subregion, the entrepreneurial activities of the immigrants also connect to other regions of the world—Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. These border-crossing practices and interactions, like those within the West African subregion, are inspired predominantly by individual self-interests, and are structured transnationally. Thus, the notion transnationalism describes much about the activities of Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs in this study as they maintain business-related links with their country of origin (Nigeria) and the country of residence (Ghana), as well as with other countries far off in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

When viewed from the enabling conditions and contexts provided by the subregional economic community of ECOWAS, the activities of Nigerian immigrant entrepreneurs in this study can be conceptualized as “firmly rooted in specific localities and nations,” (Choedup 2015, p. 10), that is in multiple or “dual institutional and cultural environments” (Rogerson and Mushawemhuka 2015, p. 137). This highlights the point that transnational immigrant entrepreneurs transform isolable geographical places into *space*, and permanent migration into a cyclical pattern. In this specific case, they further attune to the structural imperatives of the subregional economic community and international business/economic transaction norms. A transnational perspective therefore places the entrepreneurs in transnational, multi-local or trans-local spaces of context for the articulation of entrepreneurship.

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